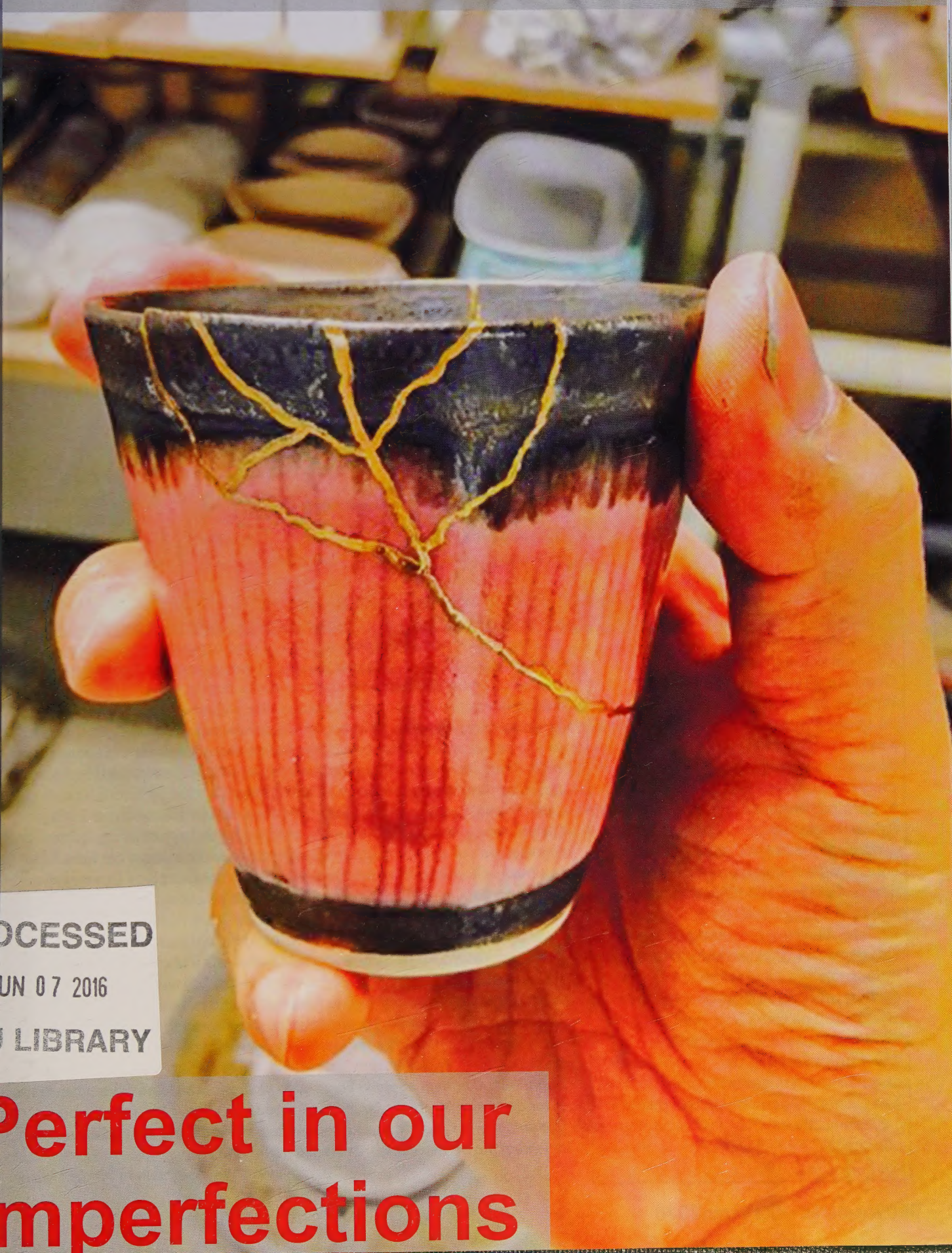


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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7891 21 May 2016



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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
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Inquiring Words

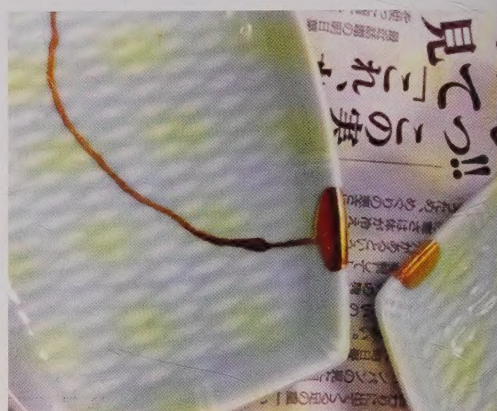
My scars remind me that I did indeed survive my deepest wounds. That in itself is an accomplishment. And they bring to mind something else, too. They remind me that the damage life has inflicted on me has, in many places, left me stronger and more resilient. What hurt me in the past has actually made me better equipped to face the present.

— Steve Goodier

Editor's view

We are all Kintsugi

He doesn't mention it, but the first thing I thought of when I read Cody Coyne's article (starting on page 2) was the Japanese art of Kintsugi or Kintsukuroi. According to the design website 'Spoon & Tamago', *kin* means gold while *tsugi* means to connect, as in connect to the world or connect to generations. And it is derived from Japanese spiritual practices.



It's a method of repairing broken pottery – not invisibly so it looks as though it's never been broken – but by calling attention to the joins. Traditionally the seams have been filled with lacquer and gold, highlighting the space between. It's a way of seeking perfection in brokenness, as the new vessel becomes a different work of art.

The cover photo and the one above are by Kunio Nakamura. He is holding a cup he repaired using Kintsugi. He is a ceramic artist in Japan who has gone to cities struck by earthquakes and offered to repair families' precious ceramics in the Kintsugi style. It's a way of remembering, of adding to the history of a beautiful heirloom and to that of a family.

I think the metaphor still holds up with Cody's ideas about Unitarian faith as he seeks to express what holds us, as Unitarians, together – without the bond of a common creed. It also brings to mind another idea about faith which has often found its way into *The Inquirer's* pages: that of the wounded healer – again, an idea that finds wisdom in brokenness.

Cody's article made me think of Unitarianism as the 'space between', the precious join where our ideas about faith, about ways of living, come together. At our very best, we Unitarians ask each other about our beliefs, our practices and that is the stuff of gold. We find moments of commonality. Those are the times when our free faith is made practical. And, when we do that, our vessels, our selves, are enriched.

Or, as Cody so beautifully puts it: 'With our brokenness being a fundamental part of our nature, we need forgiveness. To maintain that community of respect, we must likewise forgive.'

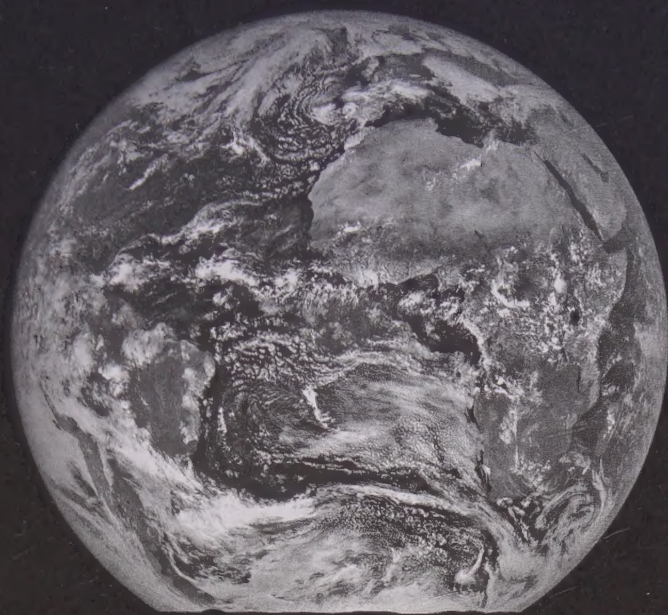
Kintsugi may have other things to teach us. Muneaki Shermodé, a practitioner of Kintsugi, said the art is becoming more significant in Japan as people turn away from a materialistic lifestyle. 'Chasing after money and things will not make us rich in a spiritual way', he said.

There's another vein of gold. The Unitarian freedom to learn from other faiths gives even more to think about.

See an interview with Muneaki Shermodé and learn more about Kintsugi in the video posted here: <https://vimeo.com/90734143>

— MC Burns

What actually binds us together?



**'We cannot
encapsulate
the world in
words.'**

NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter captured a view of Earth with the moon in the foreground from the spacecraft's vantage point in orbit around the moon. Photo by NASA/Goddard/Arizona State University

By Cody Coyne

'You are only human'. These words resounded in my ear during a personal crisis. Poor decisions, guilt, shame, regret. 'You are only human.' The perfectionist in me rails against this claim. I should be better than that. But the core of my soul recognises this is exactly what I need to hear. Only human, and yet so much more than what I considered myself at that point. Only human, so small, and yet larger than the decisions, guilt, shame, regret. These words were a call to pause and appreciate myself as a whole person, a complex combination of traits both frustrating and endearing.

'You are only human.' It's often said to remind people not to be too hard on themselves. Described alternatively as elevated apes or degenerate angels, humans balance between two ends of life's tightrope. Too fearful of this midpoint, we cling to one view or another – fallen angels, or animals in trousers. But we are, in fact, neither. Our place in the world is suspended upon this vulnerable spot. It is a difficult exhibition, but this acrobatic act displays our great potential. Some people strive to become better than we are. Others shirk any ethics not found in nature nor vindicated by science. But perhaps what is needed is not more angels, nor more animals, but humans – complete only in their incompleteness.

Coursing through time, do we feel unfinished – as if a masterstroke upon life's canvas was missing – only to feel perfect at those rare moments when we accept ourselves as imperfect? Or perhaps – as some artists argue, mistakes and imperfections are where true beauty lie – our brokenness is our grace? And sometimes in life we feel broken.

I would argue that, in addition to this, a fundamental element of what makes us human is this knowledge of our brokenness. The oracle of Delphi implores us to 'know thyself' and it is in our reflection where we learn of our mistakes and triumphs. It is here where we learn that life must be comprised of choices and sacrifice. Too often we fail to give credit to our better nature; at other times we fall foul of our folly. It is a balancing act, as so many elements in life become: the sweetness of life is dependent on knowing that we cannot do everything, and so the decisions we make, we must make with an awareness of what we will lose. This we may mourn, but so the conviction of our choices will embolden.

The Unitarian faith may be seen as a microcosm of the world: one seeks the sacred in all of life, and so services draw inspiration from many sources. The divinity of each person is affirmed, and so we seek to know one another authentically.

(Continued on next page)

Our brokenness makes us human

(Continued from previous page)

What one encounters in the world, may they find in their faith. Seen this way, we might understand why the Unitarian practice abandons the creed – a verbal declaration. In an ever-evolving world that shifts between species, between climates, between empires and knowledge, it is important to remember that language too is temporary, and what bridges our theory to the world one day may be breached the next. Words that rang true for us may ring hollow for our children's children.

Secondly, if we are perfect in our imperfection, complete in incompleteness, how could we insist that the words that give meaning for us are useful for others? Compasses direct us in different paths towards the same source, for we reside across the globe. One vital trait is humility. To accept our limited understanding of the world's map we defer to reason when it finds for us a better path. We turn to a faith with doubt, which allows this unfinished mass of human to progress through life.

These two thoughts – that human language is ever changing, and human knowledge always incomplete – form my belief in Unitarianism as a creedless faith. We cannot encapsulate the world in a few words, and were we to, these words would gradually ebb from the shore of understanding.

If we are not bound by creed, what might glue this community together? Another religious element would be ritual: Anglicans do not completely agree on the finer points of the Trinity or Resurrection, but their communion is a shared expression.

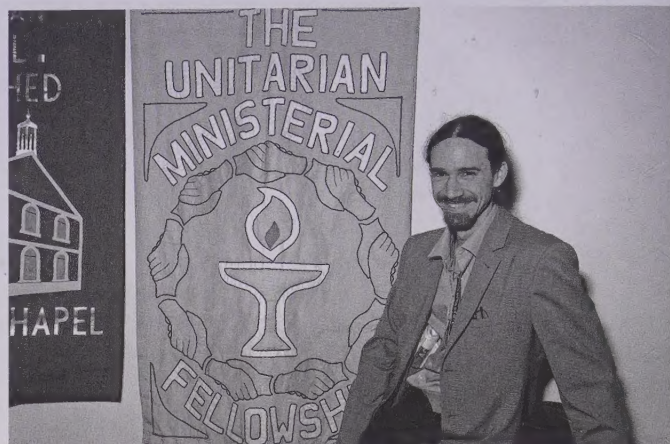
My congregation does light a chalice, and this is a practice done around the world. But there are churches in our fold which do not. Are they any less Unitarian? Were we, one day, to discover the candle missing, would our service that day fail to enlighten the soul? One element in our service is not the defining point of our faith.

So ritual does not bind us. Disregarding creed and ritual, these two traditional expressions of religious community, we might argue that the bond of our faith is deeper, more impenetrable, and less definable than we can express. Though I appreciate that sentiment, not exploring what binds us would be a failure of our creative inquiry. Unable to be defined does not mean unable to make the effort. We do not make a common profession of faith, but we often express our individual opinions and beliefs. So let us explore the bond within our religion.

Words do not bind us; rituals do not bind us. Nor do politics, nor race, nor class, nor sexuality, nor nearly any other grouping. We seek inclusion. We are fond of quoting Rumi: 'Come, come, whoever you are'.

We seek inclusion, and *that* is the binding force for Unitarians. It is an agreement of mutual respect. Understanding our individual knowledge to be limited, we engage with each other, pool our resources so that we may better understand our place within Creation and the Cosmos. Mutual respect, actions that ensure the autonomy for people to explore their spiritual depths, an environment that opens us to Earth's and Divinity's message. For without the love of each other, shown through compassion, our movement would fail to be a welcoming place for spiritual exploration.

In religious terms, this is a covenant – a mutual contract where both parties invest in the relationship. Covenants appear at specific points in the Bible: between Noah and God after



The Rev Cody Coyne photo by John Hewerdine

the flood; between Abraham and God prior to the birth of Ishmael and Isaac; and between Moses and God as the laws are set down for the Israelites. They are spoken of later by the prophets, with both Jeremiah and Jesus citing 'new covenants' when those previous were broken. Covenants originated between individuals and tribes, but were eventually used in religious language to illustrate the relationship of God; honour God rightly, and God will protect you. This vertical agreement may appear naive to some. But for many, this expression that God will love them, as they love God, is the core of their religious belief.

Individual to individual, tribe to tribe, people to God. With Unitarians this covenant speaks from core to core – the Divine element of each bound in mutual respect.

A covenant is different to a contract. One significant distinction is the flexibility of the covenant; it's ability to carry on after a transgression. This is born from its power of forgiveness. Contracts have specific points and conditions of termination, and both parties can or will leave under certain circumstances. The covenant, however, seeks to persevere even when mistakes have been made. There is an acceptance of wrongdoing. This is not to ignore hurtful words or actions – but along with recognition may come renewal. Where a contract may signal the end, a covenant says 'let us start again in love.' Through time, we learn our relationships are never finished, but continually evolve and grow. With an awareness of this, may this growth be deeper and more fulfilling.

Being human in this world necessarily implies a sense of lack or loss. Regrets are part of us; so too is the recognition of fulfilment. With our brokenness being a fundamental part of our nature, we need forgiveness. To maintain that community of respect, we must likewise forgive. With this promise, we may better witness the world, and better witness to it. From Francis David, 'we need not think alike to love alike' – we need covenants more than creeds or rituals. Let us be grateful for our community, explorers who chart the unknown depths and terrain of their hearts, the Divine, the world. We journey far away, but remain always connected. 'In a world bound not by faith or practice, we must be glued by an agreement of mutual respect.'

The Rev Cody Coyne is minister at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester.

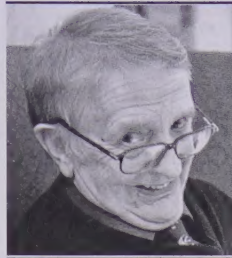
A socialist funeral, a teeny bit of bragging

It was my first socialist funeral, conducted by my wife. Dear friend Mildred Gordon, former MP for Bow and Poplar in the East End of London, had died full of years, and Golders Green Crematorium was filled with comrades expecting a 'non-religious' funeral, whatever that might be. We sang political hymns. It surprises some to think there are such things. *The Red Flag* and *The Internationale* qualify as such, as does *The Ballad of Joe Hill*. It tells of a trade union martyr whose spirit lives on, in a song made famous by Paul Robeson and Pete Seeger. Political hymns of a different hue were sung by the Nazis, and one wonders about *Land of Hope and Glory*.

A non-religious funeral? It celebrated someone who, in her Eastender Jewish community childhood, joined her parents in opposing Mosleyite street marches. Seeing her unemployed father sobbing apologetically at his inability to find work, she resolved on a life working for those worse off than herself. A career as a primary school teacher was followed by a second career, aged 63 years, as an MP, all in the tough, East End. Her personal credo was summed up in her maiden speech: 'The mark of a civilised society is that it is one in which people can expect to be decently housed and clothed, to have enough to eat and to have access to healthcare and to education for their children.' Many would regard that as seriously religious.

Among the speakers was Jeremy Corbyn, but as this is a more serious paper, I won't comment on his attire. He mentioned a story about Mildred which appeared in the *Guardian* obituary. It conjures up a delightful picture. I wish I'd been there when this East End Jewish street-fighting social justice campaigner met Her Majesty the Queen. 'At the opening of the Docklands Light Railway shortly after her election in 1987 she told the Queen, who had asked how she liked the new job, that she felt she had little power to help her constituents. The Queen replied understandingly: 'Once they find out you lot can't help them, they all write to me.'"

I enjoyed reading Stuart Hannabuss's recent *Inquirer* (7 May) piece, 'Can business and religion co-exist?' In my days as GA Development Officer, I would try to encourage congregations to be more business-like in their affairs. One colleague retorted, 'More business-like? No, we can do much, much better than that!' So, while I agree with the thrust of Stuart's article, I have to report that recently I enjoyed a train excursion across Yorkshire. With a 40-minute wait in Selby, I took a walk down into the town. First sight was the Selby Business Centre, in a nondescript prefabricated building at the back of the station car park. In the town, I strolled in the glorious spring sunshine along a boulevard, lined with trees dressed in radiant pink blossom. It led me to the town centre, where stood the mediaeval Abbey, with welcoming A-board notices outside the wide open doors: 'Drop in, teas and snacks served.' Inside this glorious place of worship, music gently played and handsome stone pillars lifted my gaze to magnificent ceilings and dazzling stained glass windows. Displays of children's activities, as well as social justice concerns and community events told me here was a lively religious community, right



Funny Old World

By John Midgley

in the heart of this attractive town. Contrasting this with the glum-looking business centre, I signed the visitors' book and thought, 'Here's a town that's got its priorities right.'

Having continuing negative feelings about the electronic publication of books and journals, it delights me when, ironically, *Facebook* contributions celebrate the joy of real print books. Having sadly disposed of hundreds of them when moving house, I struggle as our new, smaller home is still cluttered. So I was pleased, on a recent visit to the David Hockney Exhibition at the Salt's Mill Gallery, Saltaire, to find an antique shop tucked in a back room. There we snapped up a bargain of a bookcase which fitted in the car boot. Lovers of books will understand the problem of how to shelve and categorise them. A tit-bit from *The Novel Habits of Happiness* by Alexander McCall Smith, offers guidance:

'Alistair Clarke, an authority on American history and politics, shelved the books in his library on a geographical basis: books pertaining to Alaska on the top left-hand shelf, those on the Midwest in the middle, those on Florida on the lowest right hand shelf, and so on, so that the wall of shelves corresponded with the map of the United States. It was a system that must at least have been easy to remember: an alphabetical system was all very well, but if one were to forget the name of an author who wrote about the history of Texas, then at least one would know in which part of the wall of shelves to look: down on the bottom shelf, toward the middle. A variant, of course, might be a political system of shelving: books by authors of a conservative bent of mind would be placed on the right hand shelves, and those of a more socialist persuasion on the left. Books by women could be in one section, and those by men in another; books by young authors here, books by older authors there; books by authors who were known to like one another could be placed together, while those by authors who felt animosity to one another could be kept apart; the possibilities were endless.'

I love it, but my main problem is that books come in such different shapes and sizes. Fortunately, recent Lindsey Press publications are fairly consistent in size, though *Sing Your Faith* is slightly larger than *Hymns for Living*. I wonder why. I'd like to mention that my latest book is the same size as the previous one, but that might be seen as bragging.

Funny Old World: Sideways Observations from The Inquirer, by John Midgley, is available at £8.99 plus £2.50 p&p. Order from the Rev John Midgley, 2 Hirds Yard, Skipton, BD23 2AGF. Cheques to John Midgley.

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

Safeena: 'Being a Muslim in Scotland'

On about 7 June, Muslims will begin the month of Ramadan. Here, Safeena writes of how it feels to be a Muslim in Britain.

By Safeena Rashid

I was born and brought up in Scotland and I have been a Muslim all my life so everything that I do in this country is very normal to me.

- It is normal for me to testify that there is only one God and that Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is the last messenger.
- It is normal for me to pray five times a day.
- It is normal for me to read the Qur'an.
- It is normal for me to give charity and it is very normal for me to fast during daylight hours for one month every year.

I am aware that my way of living is not normal to everyone else around me though. Indeed people around me might be curious about how I live my life, or why I choose to do certain things. Some people might even be scared, because there's a natural fear of the unknown. This is why opportunities like this, where I get to explain certain aspects of Islam, are priceless for me. I would much rather a curious person or a frightened person ask me questions, rather than remain in that state of curiosity or fear forever.

Ramadan

Ramadan is the name of the Islamic month in which Muslims fast, starting this year on approximately 7 June. The physical aspect of fasting involves refraining from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse during daylight hours. Much of what we do in life is driven by the desire for these three things. Forcing ourselves to refrain from these physical acts is one way of making us realise that we should – and can – be in control of our desires rather than our desires being in control of us. Controlling desires, remaining in full control of the senses, is an important discipline for the Muslim.

This year, because Ramadan falls in high summer, that discipline will have to be exercised for particularly long days. Regardless of the long days, when you speak to Muslims in the run up to Ramadan a lot of them will be looking forward to it. When you speak to Muslims after Ramadan, a lot of them will be missing it.

Why on earth would you look forward to starving yourself during the day?

Why on earth would you look forward to not quenching your thirst in the summer with an ice cold drink?

Why on earth would you look forward to depriving yourself of pleasures in life which you would normally take for granted?

The simple answer is that fasting is so much more than a mere physical act. It has a wider spiritual dimension, especially during the month of Ramadan. Many people ask me how I manage to refrain from eating or drinking for these long hours. I know that if it were just a physical act, for example if I were fasting to lose weight, then I would not manage it. When I fast as an act of worship though, it is not the physical benefits I am craving but the spiritual benefits.

Spiritually I want to get closer to the Lord who is not only my Lord, but the Lord of the entire universe. I fast in the hope of achieving God's mercy, in the hope of gaining lots of reward for the deeds that I do and ultimately in the hope that God gives me paradise and saves me from hellfire.



During Ramadan, Muslims believe there is a better chance of the

I am unable to enumerate all the spiritual benefits but I will briefly touch on three.

Firstly, Ramadan is a month in which God promises us more rewards for our good deeds than are available at any other time of year. This is one of the reasons why you will see Muslims falling over themselves during this month to do lots of extra good deeds; for example, giving more in charity or spending longer at night praying. The act of fasting in itself is a good deed. And the exciting thing about this is that God has not actually told us how much reward we will get for it. This is because the reward is probably far beyond anything that we could comprehend.

Secondly, it is a month in which God chains the devil up. The devil is mankind's clearest and oldest enemy. He whispers in our ears to coax us into doing bad deeds, in an attempt to take us away from our Lord. If we want to do something bad, the devil will make it very appealing for us and he will also facilitate ease in doing it. If we try to do something good, the devil will put obstacles in our way to make it more difficult. During the month of Ramadan this opportunity is taken away from him. When God chains the devil up for this month it leaves us free to do as many good deeds as we want, without as many obstacles. We also try our hardest to stay away from doing bad things, in an attempt to get closer to God. Effectively Ramadan is a training course in which we prepare ourselves to successfully do battle with the devil for the other eleven months of the year.

Finally the entire month is one in which the chances of our prayers being accepted increases. This is why in the run up to this month I try to think very carefully about exactly what I

nd is completely normal to me'



answered. Shutterstock photo

want to ask of God, remembering that when I am supplicating, I am supplicating to the One who is capable of giving me whatever I seek. When I pray to God, I have that certainty in my heart that God is all capable and that God will accept my prayers. Over the years I have actually seen manifestation of that acceptance and I am confident that this year will be no different.

Eid

We work very hard during the month of Ramadan. We deprive ourselves of things we normally take for granted and we make the effort to up the level of good deeds, both in terms of quality and quantity. While ultimately we seek reward in the form of paradise, God rewards us in this life by giving us a celebration at the end of the month. That celebration is called Eid al Fitr. This is a celebration of breaking the fast. We are not rejoicing that Ramadan has come to an end but we are congratulating ourselves on having completed the month. We are also thanking God for having allowed us to complete the month. On this day a billion Muslims around the world will be celebrating Eid. The beautiful thing about Islam is that it is a way of life which, within certain remits, accommodates many different cultures. Therefore it does not matter what country I am in, what language I speak, what type of food I eat, what kinds of clothes I wear, I can still celebrate Eid. There will be certain ways of celebrating that will be universal across all cultures. For example there will be a special prayer on the morning of Eid. We will make the effort to wear nice clothes. We will visit family and friends. And there will certainly be a lot of food eaten. How this is done will vary from culture to culture.

An effort is also made to make Eid special for children. Many children are so excited about Ramadan that they will try to fast. Though fasting is not an obligation on them, they are enthusiastic about it and want to join in with everyone else. Regardless of whether or not they fast, children are an important part of the celebrations.

Being a Muslim in this country

For me, in this country, Eid is a nice experience. I head to the mosque to pray the special Eid prayer in the morning in my best clothes. I love going to the mosque where I know I will bump into family and friends. Regularly the mosques will put on activities for children in celebration of Eid. The rest of the day involves a lot of food consumption. I keep telling myself my diet will start tomorrow!

For the rest of the year, in general, being a Muslim in this country is a positive experience. Of course I have had the occasional bad experience of racism. And, unfortunately, incidents of Islamophobia are also becoming more frequent. However I know that such incidents are not representative of the general population.

I was once getting on a bus at a bus terminus. Given that I wear a headscarf, I am very visibly a Muslim. The bus driver asked me if I would prefer to live in a Muslim country. My response was no – as I was born and brought up here – I know no different to living here. When I have been abroad, to Pakistan for example, I miss home and am itching to come back after a couple of weeks away.

I am very grateful for the fact that I live in a country where I am pretty much free to live the way of life that I want. Although I was born a Muslim, I have actively chosen to practice Islam. For me, other than adhering to what is outlined by God in the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), there is no other way to get close to God. There is no better way for me to worship God than the way He sets out Himself. I sincerely believe that being in Scotland has facilitated this freedom for me to choose to practice Islam and it has facilitated the freedom for me to learn how to practice Islam.

On a day-to-day basis, my faith only has a positive effect on my life. It has not hindered me in any way. I went to state school in this country. I was the only Muslim in my year but that did not stop me getting the same opportunities as everyone else. I went to university in this country where the resources open to everyone were naturally also open to me. I work for the government in this country and I have no issues wearing the clothes that I need to wear or praying at the times that I need to pray. I live in the knowledge that if I respect others, others will respect me. I live in the knowledge that I am Scottish. Ultimately I live in the knowledge that I am Muslim.

Safeena Rashid (right) gave this address at St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh. She represented the Muslim Women's Association of Edinburgh.



Further thoughts on GA meetings

By Karl Stewart

*For everyone born a place at the table,
For everyone born clean water and bread,
A shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,
For everyone born a star overhead...*

*And God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy,
Yes God will delight, when we are creators of justice...
...justice and joy!*

Verse 1 and Chorus from no.36 in the Unitarian purple Hymn Book 'Sing your Faith'.

This year the Unitarian General Assembly Annual Meetings carried a message for all, and it's one that reminds us very prominently however it may speak to us. As usual there were all the usual business meetings, accounts and the general nitty-gritty of all the issues we discuss in our own congregations, how we look to include all within the movement as a whole.

What is particularly important is the need for us all to play a role, however small, as its all the small elements that bring us together as a whole Unitarian family. How we welcome the explorer, and one another. There we were all joined together as one. How we look to the future and feed from the feast of the spirit; there is so much to hold onto.

It was great to see so many together – all alike in working to the cause and mission as we have done for so many years already. Recognising the efforts of all is very important, from the foundation and sure rock of what we continue to believe. I felt this was demonstrated with a variety of talks and engaging subjects. We looked at the vision, race relations, values,



The 2016 GA choir sings at a service. Photo by Ed Fordham

honesty and integrity. There were talks by a trans-gendered woman about her journey, and Islamic woman about cultural education and practice, and an Anglican priest who spoke of the use of films that carry the message of the bible. To name a few.

We can all too easily get used to doing just the little bit we do, and staying safe in that; which usually means, music, flowers, tea and coffee making, service taking, Sunday schooling, roles of office, keeping the website, ministering, being all parts of ministry. What stands out though is the work of the Unitarian General Assembly as a whole, which we all contribute to the wider roles beyond, as they work in all callings to charity and hospitality; as beacons of inspiration to so many known and unknown to us.

As well as the message that says 'a place at the table', it also says a place for shelter to those who come to open hearts. We are doing so well and all we are able. As we look to the future of this next GA year and the work of Dorothy Hewerdine who has taken the baton from John Clifford as president, I hope we can all look forward to our rewards of the wider spirit and that within ourselves, as we keep a place at the table for the year ahead.

We have this great gift we can share in such capacity. As we all work to keep the spirit of belief tangible. Though we may face troubled times, we shall not stand alone; but stand as many, as roots hold us close and wings set us free.

I hope for us to be able to do this as the spirit moves us. Maybe we want to be more, but we are all we can be for now. Amen.

With care, love and blessings to all that is and can be good.

Yours with warm wishes, and a place at our table where all will be welcomed and equal.

Karl Stewart is a member of Bristol Unitarians.

Harris Manchester College
Oxford

ANNUAL MEETING OF FRIENDS and HONORARY GOVERNORS

Tuesday 21st June 2016

12.30pm Reception

1.00pm Lunch

2.00pm AGM

3.00pm Lecture: Colonel Christopher
Keeble, DSO, on Leadership and Ethics.

4.00pm Tea

5.00pm Valedictory Service for Kate
McKenna

Please inform the Bursary by June 10th if you
wish to attend the lunch: 01865 271006, or
email janet.rasmussen@hmc.ox.ac.uk

Lancaster Unitarians gather

Sunday services have re-started in Lancaster on a monthly basis in the former Unitarian Church – now Rowley Court in Scotforth Road, Lancaster, LA1 4NP, beginning at 3pm. The next service is on 5 June, followed by services on 3 July, 7 August and 4 September. They will be conducted by Dr Martin Pulbrook. All are very welcome.

– Martin Pulbrook

Letters to the Editor

Reflections on Hillsborough disaster and aftermath

To the Editor:

The lesson of the Hillsborough disaster to me is one of human failing. I had forgotten how we viewed football crowds in those days. I was scared of them and nice people made sure to avoid areas around football pitches on match days. They were always referred to as football hooligans and they drank too much and got into fights with the opposing team. Indeed many of them got into fights with fellow supporters and bashed their families up if their team lost.

I think it was not just football hooligans who were people to be avoided but also the working classes. In general the power of the mob was what scared the middle classes of which I was one. Large numbers of strong working class young men with considerable disaffection for the system – unemployment was high under Maggie T- were anxiety making and unpredictable. The miners had fought back against the police when they were on strike. The police were keeping order and were the goodies, keeping behaviour as it should be, making sure people followed the rules of civilised society so that we could all be safe. So the Police guy in charge on the day was a supreme example of a control freak. That's what he thought he was there to do, to keep control of all the troublesome drunken football hooligans. Perhaps it suited his nature.

The Rev Nicky Jenkins

Chorlton

Find ways to attract 'spiritual but not religious'

To the Editor:

In his 7 May article, the Rev John Allerton may be fair in implying that some people who say they're 'spiritual but not religious' mean merely that they 'think life has a meaning' or 'believe there is something greater than ourselves'. But groups we can join on **meetup.com** demonstrate that for others 'spiritual, not religious' means real spiritual inquiry.

A few examples: 'Raja Yoga meditation'; 'Step into the Field of Love, experience the pure Bliss of being Love'; 'Soulful Reflections in a Café to read and reflect on quotations

from different faiths, philosophers, authors, leaders and indigenous cultures from all over the world and create change in our own lives and serve others'.

Probably though, 'religious', to them, means speaking a dead language (thou, sin, Our Father) and doing dreary, pointless things (Holy Communion, hymns, 'services' of 'worship'). So, to 'export' Unitarianism to them, how about *we adapt* to their way of being, rather than requiring them to walk off their path and under our steeple?

Wade Miller-Knight

St Albans

Church should examine roots of antisemitism

To the Editor:

During the storm over antisemitism in April involving Labour politicians Naz Shah and Ken Livingstone, there was one dimension which didn't get a mention; the Fourth Gospel.

This life of Christ opens with beautiful poetry before launching into a series of teachings and accounts of miracles arranged within a cycle of Jerusalem festivals. The Wedding Feast at Cana and the Raising of Lazarus are among its stories, part of a narrative in which Jesus is relentlessly opposed by 'the Jews', portrayed as irredeemably malevolent.

A reading from this source needs sensitive choosing if selected at all in preference to material from the other three Gospels. However, not uncommonly, discretion is lacking because this Gospel is a favourite of those who are so enthusiastic for their faith that they tend to undervalue all other religions. This makes me wonder at recent politics. The Peers who objected to an antisemitic statement by MP Naz Shah, for which she has unreservedly apologised, are themselves seemingly shy at complaining to their colleagues, the bishops, over certain readings that are surely offensive.

The House of Lords has many members. Someone perhaps ought to have a special care for *seeking to prevent* what often comes across as antisemitism broadcast in the course of Christian worship; something which, hopefully, seldom occurs in Unitarian services. At the moment,

what we might affectionately call the 'Establishment' seems not to care.

Graham Murphy

Liverpool

UYPL history in the making

At the General Assembly's 1934 Annual Meetings a new denominational youth movement, the Young People's League, was inaugurated with much enthusiasm. As the Unitarian Young People's League (UYPL) this was to play an important role in our movement over the next 50 years, until its sad demise.

Even today, there are many Unitarians who came into the movement – or stayed in it – because they joined UYPL. I was one of them, having the honour to be its 1967/8 National President exactly 30 years before becoming President of the General Assembly. Our new GA President, Dot Hewardine was a UYPLer too – as were her husband, brother, and sister-in-law! In fact UYPL was to provide the movement with many of its leading figures – at local, district, national, and international level over the five decades of its existence. But we UYPLers are fading away. It would be a very great shame if the story of UYPL were never to be told, never to be recorded.

I have it in mind, therefore, to put together a history of UYPL before it's too late. A UYPL archive does exist, I believe, and I think I know where it's supposed to be (!), but it will be far less than a complete record.

Do you have any material in your possession relating to any stage of the UYPL story? If so, would you be prepared to let me have copies (preferably hard) of it? If you are looking to offload it, then send me the originals and I will find a good home for it when I've finished with it. Personal reminiscences would be welcome too, although I appreciate that you might like these to remain confidential! As to whether the end result of all this is an article, worship material and/or something more substantial remains to be seen.

(Rev) Cliff Reed

93 Brunswick Road
IPSWICH, Suffolk
IP4 4BT

David Skelton: Centre of peace, shining light

Family, friends and colleagues will remember David for his sense of humour, the connections he made with young people and his ability to offer a different perspective on life; all qualities that stood him in good stead for his life as a Unitarian minister. In fact, it was probably these qualities that drew him into the Unitarian community as a teenager growing up in post-war Croydon.

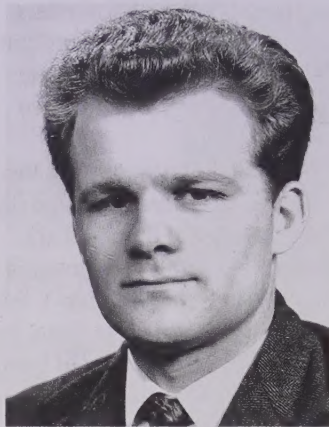
David Frank Skelton was born on 11 April 1939. So his early years were spent sleeping in Anderson shelters by night and playing with friends on bombsites during the day, until, at the age of 5, he was evacuated with his 6-year-old brother to Southport and then Huddersfield.

David received a scholarship to attend The Whitgift School, Croydon and was awarded a place to read Maths at Oxford when he was 15. Around that time, however, he was being lured away from academia by an exciting new Unitarian way of life under the guidance of the Rev Keith Treacher and the Rev Dudley Richards. Over the next two years, with Miss Beatrice Breens, he escorted the Croydon Sunday School and then the Croydon Unitarian Young Peoples' League (UYPL), which he had founded, on holidays to Great Hucklow and various camping trips. David left school aged 17 to become a Junior Draughtsman, a job which took him to Nigeria to help build roads, bridges and market places. It was at this time, however, that he felt called to ministry and so in 1958, at the age of 19, he returned to the UK and applied to train at Unitarian College Manchester.

Life was quite hectic for students! People who shared those days with David recall taking regular Sunday services around Manchester, leading youth activities, and late night discussions followed by early morning prayers. David also became a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and later the Unitarian Peace Fellowship. And it was also during his student days that David married Colleen, a fellow member of the UYPL, became a father and then suffered the premature death of his own father.

David's first ministry was at Rotherham. Whilst there he supported the start of 'Send a Child to Hucklow' with the Rev Peter Godfrey, and became involved in the formation of the Unitarian Psychical Research Society with the Rev George Whitby. He also organised a CHIPS (Cheap Holiday in Paris) for Sheffield and District youngsters. In 1966, David and his growing family moved south so that he could take up the ministry in Dover. There he ran a successful children's club and youth club. He later started a coach business and used his minibus to collect members of the church from out of town for Sunday services, the highlight being a singsong on the way home! And there were the annual church outings in his coach, when he drove members and friends out for strawberry picking, blossom drives and trips to the seaside. More formally, it was a great honour for David when, in 1967, he was asked to conduct the Sunday morning service at Dover, which was broadcast live on the BBC Home Service.

In 1981 the family moved again to North Devon, a favourite holiday destination. Whilst there he ministered part time to the Cullompton and Sidmouth congregations and served as President of the Western Union. Then, in 1997, family



The Rev David Skelton

circumstances prompted a move back to the South East and ministries in Hastings, Northiam and Tenterden where he served until he retired in 2005.

Aside from his ministries, David's later life was focused around his beloved cottage in South West France. Bought as a ruin in 1988, David and Colleen, with family and friends, enjoyed many wonderful holidays there, gradually making it more comfortable, picking plums and walnuts when in season.

In 2011 David developed cancer, which he fought with characteristic optimism until 17 January 2016. His influence, talents and love live on in Colleen, their children Deborah,

Rachel, Daniel, Benjamin and Naomi, and their grandchildren Alexander, Jonathan, Phillipa and David.

"I must become and at all times be ... a centre of peace. Thus will I dispel my material occupations, and be a shining light unto others." – The Rev David Frank Skelton

– *Written by Colleen and Rachel Skelton*



FDA 2015 participants enjoy time in the sun.

Summer Youth Programme events

An amazing summer of activity and fun for young Unitarians is planned:

• Bridging Weekend – 24-26 June – Flagg Barn, near Buxton – enjoy being in the heart of Derbyshire in this historic cottage – for 16-21 year olds and Buyan folk – £30.

• Unikids Holiday – Castles in the Clouds – 1-4 August – 3 nights in Swanage Youth Hostel, Dorset – sandcastle building, games and a trip to Corfe Castle – a holiday for 7-14 year olds – return train journey from London included – £110. Limited places for this event.

• FDA (Five Days Away) – 8-12 August – The Nightingale Centre, Derbyshire – creativity, outdoor pursuits and leadership workshops – for 12-17 year olds – £125

These reasonable prices are kept low by generous grants. If any families or individuals require a discount please let John know. There is a travel grant available if travel expenses are an issue.

Further information and booking information at <https://www.unitarian.org.uk/get-involved/youth-programme/events>
Or email John Harley at jharley@unitarian.org.uk

– *Rev John Harley – GA Youth Coordinator*



The GA Youth Programme presents:



BRIDGING WEEKEND

For 16-21 year olds

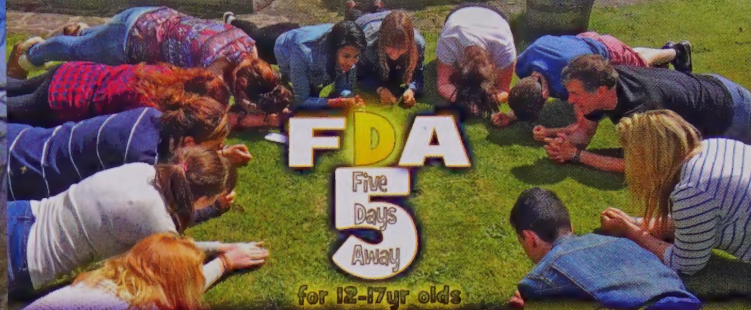
At Flagg Barn near Buxton, Derbyshire

A weekend of discussion, walks, trips out and generally chilling out
Meet some of the Buyan crowd

24 - 26 June 2016



The GA Youth Programme presents:



Five days of fun, creativity, friendships, discussions, outdoor pursuits and all sorts...

We will also be running an inspiring programme on leadership skills techniques that can be used in so many parts of our lives

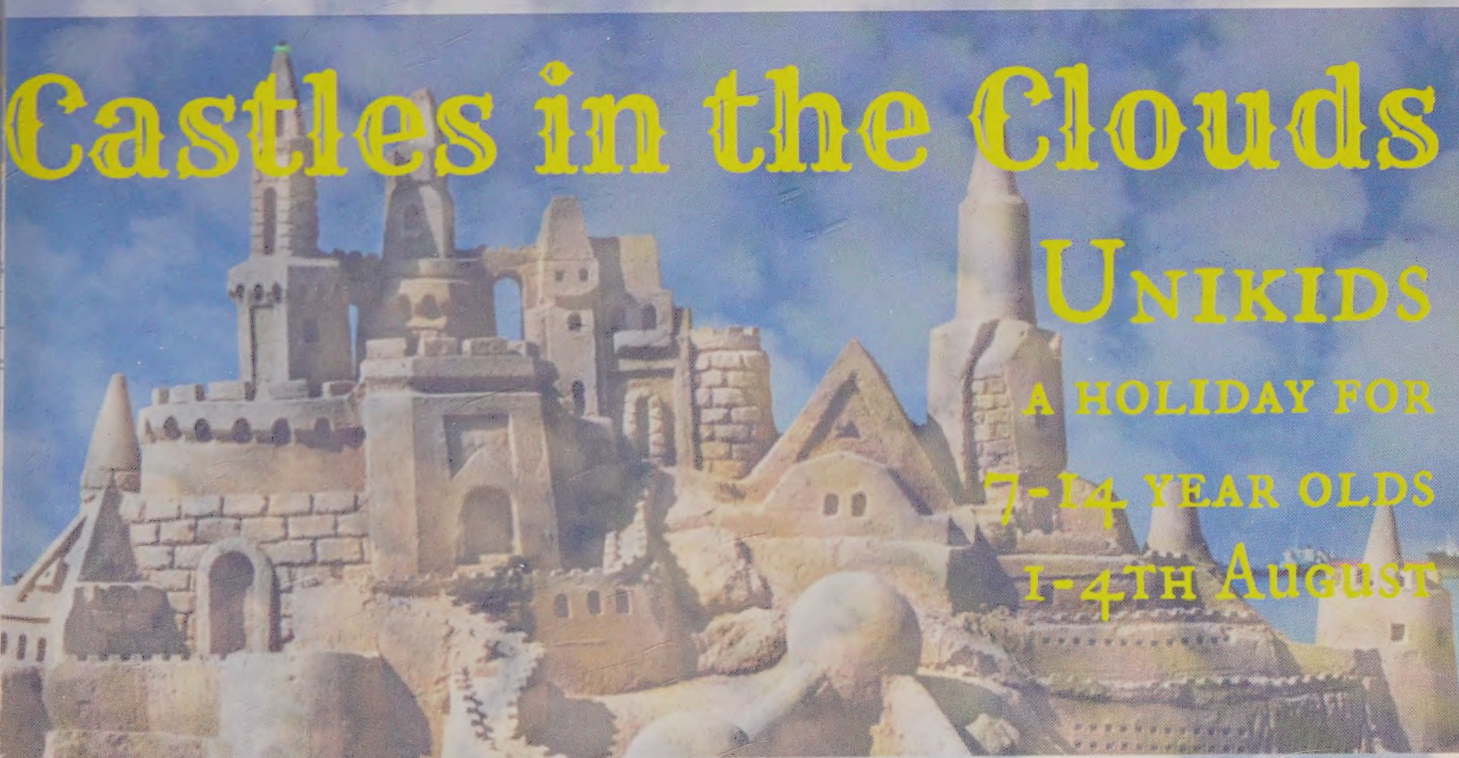


Mon 8th - Fri 12th August

The Nightingale Centre
Great Hucklow, Derbyshire

THE UNITARIAN YOUTH PROGRAMME PRESENTS:

Castles in the Clouds



UNIKIDS

A HOLIDAY FOR

7-14 YEAR OLDS

1-4TH August

WANAGE YOUTH HOSTEL, DORSET

JOIN US FOR FUN, GAMES, CREATIVITY, WALKS, AN EXPLORATION OF
UNITARIAN VALUES, SANDCASTLES AND A VISIT TO CORFE CASTLE.



Cyclists contemplate nature and faith

By Lori Winters

What a wonderful Sunday morning experience it was to be mindful and spiritually open together in the outdoors, on and off bikes! On 8 May a few of us gathered for a pilot of Sunday Spin, or Cycle Deep ('Some cycle fast – we cycle deep!') – a group cycle ride, stopping to take in sights and sounds, hear stories and poetry, express gratefulness for bikes and bodies, and to gain fresh inspiration for living from the local landscape.

It followed from the semi-annual June bike rides that the Rev John Harley and Liz Hills lead for a small group of us, from Croydon Unitarians (who host breakfast) via Ditchling Unitarians (who host tea) and on to Brighton and the pier. Last year, after hearing John talk about his rich experience on the Santiago de Compostela, while we enjoyed a picnic and the views over Turner's Hill, I challenged him to work spiritual stops into the next Brighton ride, and also to create a mini-bike pilgrimage as an alternative Sunday service for Lewisham, Liz's and my congregation. John has led alternative services for Lewisham before, in our large rear garden in the evening by firelight.

In January we had a Cycle Deep planning meeting over dinner at John's, to discuss the route and consider timings, and to generate some ideas for John to work with.

On the day, John, Liz with her border collie, Tagwen, and I assembled at the Meeting House and cycled off together. Catford, South East London has a wealth of green spaces, and we enjoyed a hot and sunny ride (and trot) along the River Pool through fields of early wildflowers and hawthorn in bloom. We stopped at a footbridge where the Pool joins the Ravensbourne River (which eventually flows into Deptford Creek and then the Thames). Here the water rushes sweetly over two weirs, and birds and insects were singing. We sat on some logs in the shade, and John led us in reading poetry aloud, speaking in turn, and then settling in for mindfulness for some time.

I have some, but not much, experience of mindfulness practice; however I would comment that I found the sequence of briskly cycling through nature with friends, dismounting into a shaded riverbank, reading aloud John's choice of poem, (The astonishing *Summer Day* by Mary Oliver. She recites it here: <http://bit.ly/1qfa359>), speaking and listening, and then opening up into mindfulness within the full sounds and scents of nature, alongside the others, to be a profoundly moving



Liz Hills, Tagwen and the Rev John Harley stop for contemplation along their 'cycle service'. Photo by Lori Winters

experience of heightened awareness that has stayed with me these several days after. In fact, I may now be entirely spoiled for Meeting House Sundays. Moving on from the weirs – did I mention we saw an egret in the river? – we cycled into Ladywell Fields, and sat beneath the Lewisham Dutch Elm, 'one of the great trees of London' according to the plaque, as it is the only mature tree of its cultivar left in London. Liz and John read us more poetry, and then we searched around for Pooh sticks to drop from another footbridge into the river. Our final stop was at the top of Hilly Fields, Brockley, where there's a stone circle oriented to the sunrise, a Millennium project of a local society. After cycling back to the Meeting House, we took food and drinks outside for a picnic in the large rear garden, where a non-biker joined us.

John said, 'Many of us sense the need to create worship in a new, accessible way—especially in ways that may appeal to people who have never experienced Unitarianism before. A cycle ride or walk outdoors with places along the way to be still and be inspired is a healthy, playful and often profound model of "doing church" and indeed one model we can explore to literally reach out to the community and to nature.'

Our Croydon to Brighton pilgrimage-style bike ride will take place on 11 June.

Lori Winters is a member of Lewisham Unitarians.

June festival features work of WB Yeats

By Jim Corrigan

The Unitarian Chapel in Padiham is hosting a Poetry Festival in June – focusing on one of the great writers of the 20th Century, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats. This follows a successful TS Eliot Festival at the Chapel last summer.

This year's event – the 'WB Yeats Festival of the North' – marks the centenary of the Easter Rising and of Yeats' famous poem *Easter 1916*. All events take place 7-9 pm at the Unitarian Chapel in Padiham. The Festival is organised by the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry. Below are the details, with titles, themes and speakers:

Saturday, 4 June, WB Yeats: The Making of a Poet – William Butler Yeats (1865 – 1939) sang in the name of an ancient Ireland. Broadcaster and poetry teacher-extraordinaire Graham Fawcett will give a lecture-performance-with-readings, part of his 'World Poets' series.

Saturday, 11 June: Sailing to Byzantium: Marriage, Masks and Magic. *Yeats: the middle years.* Lecture with readings, drama and music, by writer and teacher, Theresa Sowerby.

Saturday, 18 June: 'A tattered coat upon a stick': Yeats and old age. The poet famously wrote: '*An aged man is but a paltry thing, / A tattered coat upon a stick*' (*Sailing to Byzantium*, 1926). Lecture with readings and music by Unitarian minister Jim Corrigan.

Tickets: £10 per evening (to include wine and light refreshments), £25 for all three evenings.

Tickets can be bought from Rev Jim Corrigan, Flat 11, Lincoln Court, Station Road, Padiham BB12 8EW, with a cheque and a stamped addressed envelope enclosed. Queries to Jim on: corriganjim@gmail.com